

Stanford reigns while Arizona mourns its loss

■ The Cardinal hits No. 1 in the rankings while Arizona and Lute Olson grieve the death of the coach's wife

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Football was forgotten all over the West Coast last weekend, as the Pacific-10 Conference men's basketball season opened with fanfare and sadness.

The sadness came mostly from Arizona, where a disheartened Wildcat team fell hard to top-ranked Stanford. Southern California and UCLA made some noise in taking care of the Washington schools. Closer to home, Oregon proved itself with a big win over in-state rival Oregon State.

Heads up, folks, there's still nine more weeks of this.

Bobbie remembered

Arizona has been trying to play through the sad memories of Bobbie Olson, head coach Lute Olson's wife, since she passed away Jan. 1. Bobbie Olson was not only married to Lute, but to the team as well. Her memorial service, held Sunday, proved that she was as much a Wildcat as some of the players.

"Mrs. O meant so much to all

of us," Wildcat forward Richard Jefferson said at the service, according to the Arizona Daily Sun. "She always knew what to say, when to say something and how to say it."

Bobbie Olson's death has hit the team hard, and the Wildcats have dropped from preseason No. 1 to 21st in the AP poll. Arizona is 8-5 overall, and 1-1 in the Pac-10 after losing to Stanford Saturday.

"We really wanted to win for coach (Olson), for Mrs. Olson, for ourselves," Arizona's Luke Walton told the Arizona Republic after Saturday's loss. "We just couldn't get it going when we had to."

Rumors have Lute Olson returning to coaching the Wildcats as early as next week, when Arizona will take on Washington and Washington State in the Northwest.

Trees on top

With Stanford's victory over Arizona Saturday, the Cardinal proved that their December win over Duke and the Cardinal's 13-0 record are no fluke. Mix that with Michigan State's last-second loss to Indiana Sunday, and the Cardinal is cooking in the No. 1 spot in both the AP and ESPN/USA Today coaches polls. Stanford was a unanimous choice for the top spot in the AP poll, and received 27 of the 31 possible first-place votes in

the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll.

The Cardinal will next face Oregon State and Oregon in its first home Pac-10 games of the season.

We are family

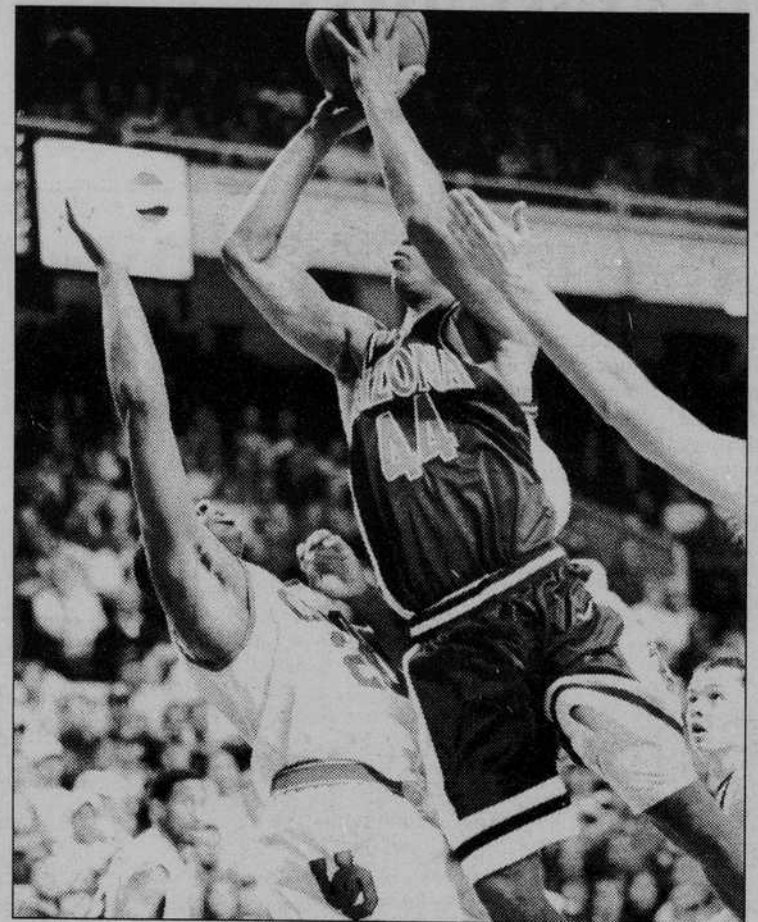
As if the wins and the top ranking weren't enough for Stanford, Jarron and Jason Collins were named the Pac-10's Men's Basketball Co-Players of the Week for the conference's opening games. The twin centers combined for 72 points and 34 rebounds against Arizona State and Arizona. The Collins brothers shot a combined 27-for-30 from the free-throw line.

Still think Jarron and Jason don't have an impact on their team? When the twins start together, Stanford is an amazing 22-0.

Higher and higher

The third Pac-10 team to break the top-20 this season isn't UCLA or Oregon — it's USC. The Trojans are ranked 18th in the most recent ESPN/USA Today coaches poll and 19th in the AP poll, following blowout wins over the Washington schools. USC takes on UCLA in Southern California's rivalry game this weekend.

Oregon was the only other Pac-10 team to receive votes in either poll, garnering 15 votes in the AP poll.



Arizona's Richard Jefferson (44) had fond memories of Bobbie Olson at her memorial service Sunday.

Group run by Starbucks CEO looks to purchase Seattle Sonics

By Luis Cabrera
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Seattle SuperSonics are close to being sold for a reported price of \$200 million to a group headed by Howard Schultz, the chairman of the Starbucks coffee chain.

The seller is Barry Ackerley, who bought the team for \$16 million in 1983. The sale could be announced by the end of this week, a league source told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

It would be the first sale of an NBA franchise since Mark Cuban

bought the Dallas Mavericks last year for \$280 million.

"The Ackerley Group does not comment on rumors, but, as is our corporate strategy and commitment, we are continually evaluating different strategic alternatives with respect to all of our assets, in-

cluding possible acquisitions, sales or divestitures," Ackerley's company said in a statement.

Starbucks spokeswoman Cheri Libby said the coffee company is not buying the team, but she said she could not speak for Schultz. Several messages left on his office phone were not immediately returned.

ESPN reported the sale price as \$200 million.

The NBA Board of Governors would have final approval over the sale, and a vote could be held at its next meeting March 29-30.

The team could lose as much as \$10 million this season, according to a financial analyst.

"Their sales at the Sonics have softened recently, sort of a residual effect of the (1998-99) lockout," said Keith Fawcett, an analyst for Merrill Lynch in New York who tracks The Ackerley Group.

Ackerley held season tickets for six years before he bought the team but now rarely attends games. He could not be reached for comment Monday.

Ackerley, 65, underwent an unspecified cardiac procedure in April. He also had two heart attacks in 1991 and underwent quintuple bypass surgery.

An Ackerley spokeswoman who declined to be identified said Barry Ackerley was not in bad health, adding that health would not be an issue in any business decision he might make.

The Ackerley Group, a media and entertainment company, owns 17 television stations, five radio stations and 6,200 billboards throughout the nation. It operates the Sonics and the struggling WNBA Seattle Storm through its Full House Sports and Entertainment arm.

"Obviously, their season has started in a disappointing fashion, so their ticket sales have been lower than expected," Fawcett said of the 17-18 Sonics. "They've signed some high-priced players like Patrick Ewing, so losses have increased."

Ewing, acquired in a preseason trade with the New York Knicks, is earning \$14 million in the final sea-

son of a four-year contract.

Merrill Lynch estimates the team will lose \$8 million to \$10 million during the NBA season, which runs from October 2000 to June this year, Fawcett said.

The Ackerley Group "is definitely exploring ways to improve shareholder value," he said. "They've given strong signals that they're considering either the outright sale or a partial sale."

Despite a cut in ticket prices, attendance is down at Sonics games. The team went from Western Conference champs in 1996 to missing the playoffs in 1999. Last season, the Sonics lost to Utah in the first round of the playoffs.

"We recognize that our sports and entertainment segment is underperforming, especially in relation to our other assets," Chris Ackerley told analysts in a conference call in December.

Forbes magazine listed the Sonics' value at \$187 million in a recent ranking of NBA franchises.

Through last season, the Sonics under Ackerley had a 17-season record of 790-572, including 13 seasons in the playoffs, four division titles and the Western Conference title of 1996, when the Sonics lost 4-2 to the Chicago Bulls in the finals.

The Ackerley Group's stock closed Monday at \$11.25 a share, up \$1.69 or 17.8 percent, on the New York Stock Exchange.

Schultz joined Starbucks as head of marketing in 1982 and went on to buy the company in 1987 with the backing of local investors.

He increased the company from 17 retail cafes to its present 3,300 around the world, with 37,000 employees and annual sales of more than \$1.6 billion.

Schultz sat courtside with Magic Johnson at a Sonics game against the Dallas Mavericks on March 7 last year. Starbucks in 1998 formed Urban Coffee Opportunities, a joint venture with the former NBA star's Johnson Development Corp., to put Starbucks cafes in inner cities throughout the United States.



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